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Plus Que Parfaites. Les aides familiales à Montréal, 1850-2000. Raphaël de Groot and Elizabeth Ouellet. Montréal: Éditions du remue-ménage, 2001; illustrations + 177 pages; ISBN 2-89091-185-3; \$19.95 (paper).

"At the beginning my employers often told me I was part of their family. Yes, in a way, because I work in the family, but, I am not part of *their* family. I have to say that to make my work visible, to show that I have a profession. I am not their aunt visiting their home to help. No. I work, but, despite that, I live their difficulties with them" (Evidence of Eline Ayetola, 111). These words capture the themes of this book, and the strengths of the women who work as family helpers, its main subject. The book has three main chapters: the first offers an historical overview of work in private homes in the Canadian city of Montreal between 1850 and 2000, based largely on secondary literature; the second presents women's experiences as family helpers and others who had nannies through material drawn from interviews; the third summarizes the history of the organization of home helpers and outlines the ongoing challenges they face.

Plus Que Parfaites began as an exhibition, organized as part of the ongoing fight by organized domestic workers in Montreal to raise both public consciousness and that of home helpers about their work conditions and the problems of immigration law and of their employment contracts. The book thus continues that struggle, one which is ongoing for the Association of Family Helps of Quebec (L'Association des aides familiales du Québec). It makes an important contribution in showing how family helpers, as women performing tasks seen as part of women's work as mothers and wives in the home, continue to have problems securing official recognition of the skills involved, and hence in establishing their right to be covered by labour laws. It chronicles the original work of the Association, and it shows the injustices the special status accorded domestics in immigration law has caused.

The major contribution, and most moving part of the book, is the second chapter. Here we hear women's own stories. The first are five women who began working as family helpers between 1915 and 1950. Through the words of these "rare pearls" -

Gracia, Noella, Cecile, Lucille, Ginette - readers learn of women who had a range of experiences, positive and negative, but loved their work. In contrast to the arguments of many historians, these women preferred work as domestics and home helpers to factory or office labour. In the second section, Raphaël de Groot reproduces interviews with five women raised in part by nannies. Through their memories of Angelina, Carmen, Tante Fifine, Nen and Tante Cecile emerge images of family life that tear apart the picture of "traditional" families where children were raised by two parents, to show the significant role of unmarried and childless nannies who stepped in to provide love, care and education for children as well as significant companionship to some of their mothers. The final section presents the reflections of five women currently working as family helpers. The testimonies of Aline, Rolande, Naina, Shirani and May reveal not only the pride they take in their work and the challenges some of them face as immigrants, but also the ways they insist on their skills and rights as skilled workers.

Appropriately, this is a popular rather than academic history, accessible to the women whose lives it documents, as it will be to undergraduate Women's Studies students. It could be used in the classroom to raise issues about domestic labour and its ongoing lack of adequate recognition in today's society. The illustrations are as rich as the testimonies - especially the series of six twinned photos showing past and present home helpers in parallel situations. It is a pity that the reproductions of some of the visual images are not of higher quality.

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Of Property and Propriety: The Role of Gender and Class in Imperialism and Nationalism. Himani Bannerji, Sharzad Mojab, and Judith Whitehead, eds. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2001; xii + 244 pages; ISBN 0-8020-4380-1; \$60.00 (cloth).

Of Property and Propriety is an ambitious study of the troubled intersections between nationalism and feminism. Bringing three pieces on modern India together with articles on Irish, Finnish

and Kurdish nationalism, the editors of the collection argue for renewed attention to relationships of property (class and the mode of production) and of propriety (the moral and sexual regulation of women).

The introduction is a tendentious critique of post-colonial histories and of Subaltern Studies, arguing that these approaches erase social relations in favour of a purely linguistic analysis (6). Where the Subaltern Studies collective argue for a critical reading of European notions of enlightenment, modernity, and rationality, Bannerji, Mojab, and Whitehead insist that these are in fact the only real bases for a critique of traditional hierarchies and patriarchal structures. In their own articles, all three of the editors develop these themes in different ways. Himani Bannerji's "Pygmalion Nation," for example, is an extended criticism of Partha Chatterjee, a leading member of Subaltern Studies. According to Bannerji, Chatterjee's work is not merely descriptive, but prescriptive; operating from the assumption that one must be either for or against "enlightenment" and "modernity" Bannerji reads (wrongly, in my view) Chatterjee's critique of these notions as an endorsement of the "patriarchal and upper class/caste imaginary of the hindu revivalists" (39; 69).

Other articles in the collection present a rather different picture. Dana Hearne, for example, analyzes the partial and ambivalent investments in nationalist ideology within the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), whose leaders saw themselves as feminists, socialists, pacifists, and nationalists (97). While Hearne notes that the IWFL was ultimately "marginalized by the nationalist struggle," she does see its perspective as one "which had the power to remove the straitjackets of the multiple patriarchies of unionism, Protestantism, nationalism, and Catholicism" (110). Uma Chakravarti's study of wifedom and widowhood in eighteenth-century Maharashtra explores relationships between the state and Brahman elites and reveals elite women's complicity in the maintenance of gender and caste hierarchies (239).

Kaarina Kailo's article on the *Kalevala*, a collection of folk-tales first published in the nineteenth century, is quite sympathetic to post-colonial approaches. According to Kailo, the *Kalevala* has been used to narrate and organize unequal relationships between Finnish people and

the Sami, the indigenous people of northern Europe. Invoking Gayatri Spivak's idea of "strategic essentialism" Kailo traces the way in which Sami women writers have challenged mainstream depictions of their "ways of living and knowing" in order "to deconstruct the most dysfunctional, misogynist, ethnocentric, and anti-ecological dimensions of the dominant philosophies and practices" (197; 206).

Of Property and Propriety provides a valuable overview of a range of possible approaches to the role of gender and class in imperialism and nationalism. Even more valuable would have been an effort to confront directly the substantial differences in approach in the various articles, raising questions which, when worked through the context of these case studies, could produce new and more productive ways of thinking about these relationships.

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Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s. Alexandra Palmer. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press 2001; illustrations; viii + 352 pages; ISBN0-7748-0826-8; \$65.00 (cloth).

In her book Palmer imposes order on the *haute couture* industry in the Canadian city of Toronto during the 1950s. She outlines the industry's connection to the broader fashion culture in Europe and introduces us to the major designers and leaders of Toronto's fashion industry. We also learn who the women are that made up Toronto's fashionable elite. These were the women who wore the suits, dresses and hand-embroidered gowns created by the most prestigious designers of the time: Pierre Balmain, Christian Dior and one of the few women designers, Coco Chanel. The author's background as curator of historical clothing allowed her to confront questions regarding the fashion industry that inspired her to undertake this project. For example, she became curious about such things as why the industry was important during the 1950s, a period which she refers to as the "the golden years of haute couture" (3). The author was not just interested in fashion from a commercial perspective or from a cultural